

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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TITLE: Agriculture Change and The Struggle to Keep Up

**PRODUCER/HOST: Jon Steinman
TRANSCRIPT: Pat Yama**

JON STEINMAN: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, produced in the studios of Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. My name's Jon Steinman.

Here on Deconstructing Dinner, we take a deeper look into the food that we purchase either at restaurants or grocery stores, and discuss the impacts that these choices have on ourselves, on our communities, and the planet.

For more information on previous broadcasts of this program or to comment on the program itself, you can visit the Deconstructing Dinner website at www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner.

For many of us, our relationship to food extends to the moment when we grab an item off the grocery store shelf, or perhaps throw some fruits and vegetables into a plastic bag and toss them into our shopping cart or basket. Rarely do we get the opportunity to look behind the shelves and rows of fresh produce and shake hands with the very people responsible for growing and producing these items.

Unless we take the opportunity to visit a local farmers market or perhaps walk right up to the door of the farmer or producer themselves, for all we know, the boxes of cereal, the cartons of milk and the 5 lb. bags of potatoes were all grown and produced right in the grocery store itself.

But of course this is not the case, and there are entire communities of people across the world who devote their lives to growing and producing the food that sustains you and I. But the livelihoods of farmers and producers are not as secure as that bottom row of apples that holds all the other rows above it in place. And I am not referring to farmers in Africa or Third-World countries, struggles exist right here in British Columbia and across Canada as well. It has already been mentioned on previous broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner that farmers' incomes in this country are at all time lows, while the agricultural and food industries are making record profits.

So I recently went behind the shelves so-to-speak, and found myself at a meeting of regional farmers and producers as they discussed the most important issues that affect them, and how they should go about responding to these

issues. This was a meeting of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society, a member-based group that represents farmers and producers growing and producing organic foods predominantly in and around the communities of Creston, Castlegar, Nelson and the Slocan Valley.

Invited to the meeting was Brent Warner. Brent is an Industry Specialist with the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. And he was invited from Victoria to present a broad range of issues that affect not only organic farmers and producers, but small-scale producers and farmers in general.

On today's show we will listen to clips from Brent's presentation, and by doing so, hopefully better understand the issues that face the people behind the very food that we buy and eat. And most importantly, we will hopefully better understand how even when we purchase foods that were *not* grown and produced here in this province, that these food choices nevertheless affect the livelihoods of the very people living throughout the rural communities of British Columbia.

Before we listen to clips from Brent Warner's presentation, it's probably important to give you some background information on Brent himself but also on the meeting at which he presented.

The meeting was held in Nelson by the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. And the society is comprised of 21 member farmers, producers and processors but the society itself is one of 14 certifying bodies across the province that fall under the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia. These associations are responsible for the little "BC Certified Organic" logos you see on many of the foods that are available at markets or grocery stores.

To give you an example of the kinds of people who were attending the meeting – along with the many farmers and producers in attendance, there were also people in the audience who were interested in perhaps *becoming* a certified organic farmer or producer. There was someone from the Invasive Plant Council of BC – who provided information to farmers on the various weeds and plants that could negatively affect their crops and livestock. But then there was me, who outside of being there as someone who represented media and primarily wanted to record the meeting itself, was also a consumer that found myself being just as connected to the issues being discussed as anyone else at the meeting. As I sat there looking around the room, I saw the couple that grew the Mesclun mix salad greens that were on the second shelf of my refrigerator. A few chairs beside me was the guy that grew the radish greens that were also in my refrigerator. And at the back of the room were the farmers that grew my potatoes – the same ones I had used the night before to make a batch of french fries. And it was then that I realized that all these issues that were being discussed and were about to be discussed at this meeting, were just as important to me as they were to these people – to these farmers and producers.

So although Brent Warner's presentation is directed to the concerns of those trying to earn a living in the agricultural and food production business, his presentation is also directed to each and every person in this province.

Before I do play these clips from Brent's presentation, I will mention that the quality of these clips is not ideal and I do apologize for that.

And again, Brent Warner was the guest speaker at this meeting, and Brent is an Industry Specialist with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. He specializes in Agritourism and Direct Marketing. Brent is also the Secretary for the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association, and was also recently the author of "Marketing on the Edge," a guide designed for small-scale farmers and producers who want to market their products directly to the consumer.

But what is direct marketing? – well, in terms of agriculture and food, it is the marketing of farm-grown products directly to you and I at either farm stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms or through consumer-supported agriculture (CSAs). And the reason this form of marketing is so important, is because as Brent explains in this first clip, Canada's farms are changing rapidly. Take a look at the number of companies in the agriculture and food industries. These companies are rapidly consolidating and further increasing their dominance over our food supply. Those who choose *not* to adopt the many unsustainable forms of industrial food production that result from this quest for dominance, are left to fend for themselves, as these industrial methods of agriculture, processing and distribution allow for seemingly unlimited budgets to advertise and promote their products.

BRENT WARNER: The reality of Canada's changing farms is that we're having less and less farms and less and less farmers. We have 30 odd million people in this country and yet our farm population has crashed. This is not atypical on the continent, it's happening all over North America. The farms that are left are getting bigger and bigger – you know that. You can talk about a big hog farm or a big orchard or whatever – the bigger farms just keep getting bigger. The small farms and the medium-sized farms – the small farms are growing a bit with their young people coming to agriculture but the medium-sized farms are disappearing.

What happened to our AG system in North America and basically around the world is that we've urbanized. And if you look at the farm population in the United States, in 1900 farm population was 39% of the population and today it's 1.9%. Those numbers are basically the same as here. So we have four or five major cities in this country where everybody lives and the rural economies are being depopulated.

JON STEINMAN: In continuing on from Brent's mention of this urbanization and declining rural populations, on a recent broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner

leading up to the recent federal election, I presented some interesting statistics that I will put forward once again. For one, 80% of Canada's population lives in urban centres. Now compare this to the 60% of the population that lived in urban centres only 50 years ago. At this time 50 years ago, over half of Canada's rural population was involved in farming. Today, only 11% of Canada's rural population is involved in farming.

Certainly one of the reasons for the decreasing number of farmers in this country is due to the technological innovation that has replaced them. Now this technological innovation that has resulted in increased efficiency of production, has also allowed for an increased level of efficiency in convincing people to support these industrial methods of food production.

And there presents the cycle – as this information or advertising is more effectively reaching the masses of people in these growing urban centres, the foods that are then consumed, are the very items that continue to fuel these rapid changes in agriculture that Brent refers to. And as we support these massive food producers, we only help push our local farmers and producers out of business.

But the impact of advertising is not the only fuel for these changes. Taking a look at the information that is being provided or let's say, administered to children and teenagers is a key factor contributing to these agricultural changes. Brent touched on this in his presentation.

BRENT WARNER: Where do our children learn about the food? Where does the population learn about the food? It's not like it was in the old days. If you look at in 2002 where the U.S. government spent \$48 million on nutrition for kids and McDonald's spent \$1.3 billion. And we get the same advertising here and we have the same little bit of money thrown at the food care system and education by our governments. So we're absolutely inundated with education about food which is not the education which we'd like to see.

JON STEINMAN: Again we're listening to clips of a presentation by Brent Warner here on Deconstructing Dinner. Brent who is with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture conducted this presentation in Nelson at a recent meeting of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. And why is this important to those of us who have nothing to do with farming and food production? Well, because Brent's presentation highlighted the key changes in food production that small-scale farmers and producers need to be aware of, and given these farmers and producers are the very people growing and producing our food, these are issues that affect us all.

As Brent touched on these rapid changes that are taking place in the way our food is grown and produced, he mentions how the beginning of these changes we see today are a result of innovations made over 60 years ago.

BRENT WARNER: There's been some major changes in agriculture in our generation, most of our generations, or our parents' generation that contribute dramatically to what we're experiencing right now and most of you are probably not aware of it. It wasn't until the 1940s that we actually had refrigerated trucks that allowed this massive transport of food from side-to-side of the continent. So if you look at things like grapes and broccoli and asparagus, that's what allowed all this product to move. In the old days we had community agriculture systems because the product couldn't be shipped that kind of distance.

I've got a great video in my office from the 1940s from the Saanich Peninsula when they actually use to load trainloads of strawberries, pack them in ice and ship them to Calgary off the Saanich Peninsula of Vancouver Island. That was sort of the pre-dated refrigeration, they were packing things in ice. So this is what changed things. And as you're also all aware of we're seeing more and more shipment – this type of farm on Saanich Peninsula whose also got a brother-in-law in Peru and he grows asparagus in Peru – most of you have probably seen asparagus here when your own local stores coming in from Peru. We're seeing a lot of imported product. Product that will ship broccoli which ships forever comes from all over the world. Doesn't taste like broccoli but it looks like it.

JON STEINMAN: Brent then explained who recently has become the largest food retailer in the United States.

BRENT WARNER: So we look at where our food in society is coming from. It's not coming from the local farmer anymore. And even in the grocery retail section there's a huge change as to who's supplying food. We're seeing more and more of the big box stores get into food and Walmart is the largest food retailer in the world. And that's happened in the last five years, so things have changed very, very quickly.

JON STEINMAN: I too was shocked when I heard this, that Walmart is the largest grocery store chain in the world.

It was only in 1998 when Walmart announced that three “experimental” grocery stores would open in Arkansas. And by 2001, Walmart was the largest grocery retailer in the world with \$56 billion in sales. And although Walmart is probably the most criticized company on the planet, they are just that, because they provide the most transparent window into the influence that any large grocery retailer has on shaping and determining the way our food is produced and distributed.

You may be saying well we don't have any Walmart grocery stores here in Canada, or superstores as they are called. But believe this that Walmart Canada has just recently announced that the company plans to open up to three Walmart Superstores by early 2007 here in this country. They are presently seeking

municipal approval for a location in the East end of Toronto and for one in London, Ontario.

But again, Walmart's influence on shaping our supply of food is not so different than any other grocery store. As was mentioned in a previous broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner, if the Overwaitea Food Group, who is the parent company of Save-on-Foods among others, wants to sell eggs from chickens that spend their lives in tiny cages in which the birds can't move, well, the farming and production operations that provide these very eggs are going to thrive and they are going to expand. And that is just what we see happening to the production of all foods. And as this happens, the small-scale farmers and producers struggle and if they're not struggling, it's because they have disappeared. But the most influential person in determining the survival of these industrial forms of agriculture, distribution and retail, are you and I – the people purchasing the food, and the people eating the food.

It has been said that for every Walmart grocery store that has opened up in the United States – two local ones have been forced to close down. And one of the key reasons this happens, is that the people in these communities choose to purchase the cheaper and perhaps more convenient food available at these large grocery outlets. And Brent Warner expanded on this.

BRENT WARNER: People will say to me that food costs too much. Yes for some segments of the population it's a cost and it's an access issue, but in general our food costs in North America continue to decline as a percent of our disposable income. We have the cheapest food in the world in North America. There's no argument on that. Between the United States and us, we range between paying on whose statistics you're looking at, 7 to 10 or 11% of our disposable income we actually spend on food as a society. There are lots of people who can't afford food, that's a different issue. That's an access issue and a poverty issue but as a society we have continued to push the price of food down and that's had dramatic effects on how we can produce this food.

JON STEINMAN: A recent article in the Globe and Mail mentioned that in 1997, Canadians put 12.5% of their spending money towards food. Today, that figure is about 9¼ %.

As cheap food may be more attractive to many of us, in many cases it's only attractive so that disposable income can then be redirected towards other desires. And this leads into Brent's next point, that our lifestyles and priorities have also influenced the way our food is grown and produced.

BRENT WARNER: And the other thing that's happening is that society's moving very quickly in North America, eating half of their meals outside the home. In 2012 we expect half of what you consume will be eaten outside the home. That has a huge impact on what you eat, how you eat it, how healthy it is for you, all

those types of things. And even what we eat at home is being geared up by the food industry to be what they call *home meal replacements*. So even though you buy in your grocery store, you're still taking it home and basically either microwave it or open it and you eat it – not actually prepare anything. And there was a huge change in the late 70s and early 80s, we started seeing the advent of the washed salad mixes. And I can remember having discussions in those days where produce managers and farmers thought it was the most ridiculous thing in the world. Who would ever buy washed salad mixes? I mean how dumb can that be. People just buy lettuce, they're going to go home and they're going to eat salad. Now go to your average supermarket and look how much space is devoted to just lettuce or anything that isn't already prepackaged. It's all bagged salad greens – that has been a rocketship since the 80s and it continues to grow.

JON STEINMAN: We're going to take a quick musical break and when we return, we will continue to hear clips from the presentation of B.C. Ministry of Agriculture's Brent Warner.

musical intermission

And we're back to Deconstructing Dinner. That musical intermission was courtesy of Flanger and was taken off their album *Midnight Sound*, released back in 2000.

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If you are just tuning in, on today's show we're listening to clips of a presentation by Brent Warner. Brent who is with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture conducted this presentation in Nelson at a recent meeting of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. And why is this important to those of us who have nothing to do with farming and food production? Well, because Brent's presentation highlighted some of the key issues that small-scale farmers and producers need to be aware of. And given these farmers and producers are the very people growing and producing our food, these are issues that affect us as well.

As Brent continued his presentation, he expanded the issues of small-scale farmers and producers to those using organic methods of production, such as those in the audience. He explained that even organic foods have now become a commodity.

BRENT WARNER: I want to briefly talk here about organics. We'll talk a bit at the other end of the presentation. The organic industry's been growing very, very quickly. So did any of you go to the conference in Victoria a few years ago – 2002? Yeah, I was one of the organizers of that. There was a real split

happening then and it's just gotten worse in to what's happening in the organic community is that organic is now becoming a commodity. A lot of you are aware of that organic products are coming to North America from outside of North America even now. I mean, in B.C. we don't even use 20% of the organic produce we've consumed is coming from other areas. And that's a serious issue for you as a small producer. If people are simply buying organic you may be out of the picture because if they're only looking for an organic label and not a local label then that cuts you out.

JON STEINMAN: For consumers, it certainly does become a fine line on which to balance food choices. Many organic foods are now being produced using methods that although may still be organic, are resembling the very practices of industrial forms of production. Simply look at the origin of the many organic foods available in grocery stores – many of them come from thousands of miles away. In fact many of the familiar organic labels we see in grocery stores are owned by the very companies that organic producers would argue are destroying the planet through unsustainable methods of agriculture and production. Muir Glen and Cascadian Farms for example are owned by General Mills. Pick up the popular Rice Dream and Soy Dream products and you can find connections to Heinz.

And although we as the consumers are faced with even more complex decisions, the small-scale organic producers like those in the audience at this very presentation, must still rely on local and regional support for their products as they compete for shelf space with these massive producers of organic foods.

There are many examples of retailers now who are choosing to place local foods as a priority over organic foods. And Brent gave an example.

BRENT WARNER: This is a very interesting chain of six grocery stores in Portland, Oregon that's just opened up in the last two years. They promote the fact that they source as much as possible locally. Yes they try to get organic but they get local first is their whole mandate and they now have six stores in the city of Portland. There's a good quote on a book which isn't out yet, I want to get it when it comes out. I think there's a gathering sense that organic and local are not same. And I hope so. I hope there is that sense – that's the sense we need. First we need local, then we need organic because if you first think organic, we're going to have some serious problems. And Oregon is one of the few states in the United States because of that interest in buying locally, the actual number of farms are increasing. So they're seeing more and more little farms associated with the urban areas in bringing food into the cities.

JON STEINMAN: The example of the Portland chain of grocery stores that supports local businesses before anything else is certainly a rare example of an actual chain of stores that does so. But in many communities across B.C, individual retailers who support local do exist. And as has also been the case, there are many people in communities who have also made efforts to encourage their

grocery store managers to support local producers who are otherwise forced to sell their products using other means.

Again, remember that these clips of Brent Warner are from a presentation he was giving to local farmers and producers. And all the difficulties that our industrial-style food systems in North America presents to small-scale producers has led Brent to specialize in how local products can best be produced for local communities.

Brent explained one more key shift in the way food is produced in B.C. and how this shift affects the smaller producer.

BRENT WARNER: My discussion has always been with the farm community how to produce local products for local communities. This pre-dates organic. In the 70s and 80s I was always thought of as a lunatic because I was talking about this type of thing. And I've pretty much outlived all of my predecessors who have since retired. The big commodity guys are gone. I mean we don't have any ability to produce commodities in B.C. There are a couple of things we can produce like milk and chicken because they're commodity-controlled but if you look at a big industry in this province that's not in trouble, I don't know which one you're going to look at. You don't want to talk about apples in this province because it's a disaster. So, if we get peoples aim to be local first, regional second, provincial, Canadian, North American, etc. buying out, I mean we're not going to produce oranges on Vancouver Island. If people want to have oranges they're going to have to source them from somewhere else.

JON STEINMAN: As Brent indicated how here in B.C. there is very little opportunity now for farmers and processors to produce commodities, given these staple products of our food supply are either being produced using industrial style methods, or in many cases, have been shipped out to be produced by people in other countries.

I for one was amazed that we as British Columbians and as Canadians could have allowed for these staple foods and ingredients that we survive on to have been taken over by these large companies and placed into the hands of people on the other side of the planet.

But it's us who have allowed this to happen. As was mentioned earlier here in Canada, the percentage of our income that we put towards food is decreasing rapidly. As it is right now, we contribute just over 9% of our income towards food purchases. Compare that to 1982, when on average, Canadians put over 15% of our income towards food. Taking a look at comparative statistics between 1982 and 2002, it was interesting to see where our income is now being directed to. For one, the percentage of income put towards taxes has increased – it's somewhat ironic given that a nice chunk of our taxes heads towards the Canadian farmers who are struggling to survive while the agricultural and food

corporations are raking in profits. So as farmers' incomes decrease so too does the percentage of income Canadians spend on food.

Continuing to look at these comparisons between 1982 and 2002, another area where Canadians have shifted our income expenditures from food, is a significant increase in transportation expenses. This too is baffling given as also mentioned before there is a rapidly increasing rate of urbanization where populations from rural communities are quickly moving into larger urban centres where public transportation is plentiful.

And another area where Canadians are spending more is on health care. Is there perhaps a connection that as we spend less on food, we spend more on health care?

But jumping ahead, as we spend less of our income on food expenditures, this only allows the mega food producers and retailers to become even more powerful and this of course puts the small-scale ones out of business. As Brent explained to those producers in the room, these social and economic changes have left very little room for the marginally successful producer to survive.

BRENT WARNER: The change is ramping up - the speed of change in agriculture is getting quicker every year. In the early 80s when I was involved in a lot of field trials it didn't seem like things were changing as quick as they have in the last three to four years. And a quote here that "the complexity of modern farming keen competition leaves little room for the marginally successful farmer." In other words, you've got to look up every now and then when you're out in the field and figure out what the market is, what's changing out there. You can't keep producing the same thing. We've got an operation in Kelowna now that is actually producing sliced apples in a bag preserved with ascorbic acid. It's a totally healthy product. There's no additives other than basically lemon juice on apples and they last in the bag for 21 days. And you say well, that's so stupid, why don't people just eat apples. Well, you know it's an opportunity. What it does for him, gets him in the vending machines. Vending machines in this province are all going to be changed in the next four years as we don't want any unhealthy vending machines in any of our schools. And he's set up to be one of the guys in that business so there's an opportunity he was thinking of.

JON STEINMAN: Brent continued to explain the importance of small-scale producers in diversifying and producing more than just one product.

BRENT WARNER: This is a great quote from a fellow at University of Missouri – "When I was in university, what we were taught in high school was farmers and the AG industry that specialized get really good and do one thing really well. Grow the best apple and you'll do fine." And in the background he's saying what the companies are doing behind that, they were diversifying. They were buying out the whole food chain like Tyson Foods. They own the entire chicken chain.

They didn't just specialize in growing chickens so what Bill Heffernan is saying is diversify; get into more than just production.

A quote out of the University of Georgia – you can read it but basically I'm paraphrasing. He's saying that food is not going to be a priority for AG producers on this continent. What he means by that is big AG is not going to be concentrating on food. You've already seen that. We see the corn industry talking about biofuels so if they're not concentrating on food, who's going to produce the food? It's going to be you folks or it's not going to be produced here.

JON STEINMAN: With the recently explained trends in food purchasing habits and their effects on determining the way our food is produced, Brent also explained that there is starting to be a move in the other direction, where people are starting to think of food as *not* just the cheapest thing that we can buy.

BRENT WARNER: And here's the big change that just happened. I can remember when I was in university, all we concentrated on was how many people in the world were underfed and starving and when this massive epidemic was going to essentially eliminate the world. Well we still have huge numbers of people that are starving on certain continents like Africa. Last year in 2004 we now have just as many people that are overfed and overweight as we do that are starving. So there's a real dichotomy in the world of two groups of people and yet they both have problems with agriculture.

This is a North American profile these days. You can see it on any magazine you want to look at – that was just National Geographic last summer. And it's not why our Americans are so fat, it's actually North Americans – we're just as fat as they are so anybody that thinks that Canadians are – we're not behind in that race at all. I'm saying that the race is over. There's no feast that does not come to an end. Finally we've caught the attention of governments and people and they're starting to think about food as something other than the cheapest thing they can buy. It's not everybody, but it is changing.

JON STEINMAN: As Brent continued on with his presentation, he presented a slide of images that illustrated some common foods we see being consumed here in North America, and then he made the link to increasing rates of diabetes.

BRENT WARNER: This is the diet that got us there – deep fried Twinkies in the middle which is the number one food item at most of the Fall Agricultural fairs on the continent (audience murmurs). Various other things – a Big Gulp which contains most of your teenage kids that hang out at 7-Eleven drink a couple of those a day. They've got 48 teaspoons of sugar in each one. In 2003 there was a major story in the Vancouver Sun – the obesity epidemic is a symptom of some major disease epidemics that are coming. Diabetes in this province is out of control. In 2003 they were saying that one in three children born in this province is at risk of Type II diabetes, strictly based on diet. Type II diabetes in children is

a sign that they've got a very poor diet. And I gave a presentation with some health people in Vancouver and I ran into a couple of doctors there from Children's Hospital. They were telling me one thing that I'd never thought about that they're seeing now is kids under the age of 15 that need liver transplants because of the fat that they've eaten all their entire life. So there're some huge costs that are associated with not eating properly.

The CDC - Centre for Disease Control has a great quote that if you looked at any epidemic whether it's influenza or plague, they're not as serious as the epidemic of obesity. And the epidemic of obesity is related to all these diseases.

JON STEINMAN: As Brent indicated the connection between increasing rates of diabetes and the diets of which Canadians have chosen to spend less and less of our income on, we can quickly refer back to the recent mention of how Canadians are also spending more on health care, which of course means so too is our government. Here in B.C. for example, it is forecast that provincial health care expenditures will increase by 7.4% in just this coming year.

With health care as a key issue at the forefront of Canadian politics, rarely is it mentioned that our eating habits and our food supply could perhaps be a direct cause of these health care concerns. So instead of perhaps reforming Canada's industrial and globally dependent food system and perhaps encouraging more sustainable local and regional ones, our federal government seems to be more interested in privatizing the health care system. Brent explained the difficulty that our government faces in trying to maintain a public health care system.

BRENT WARNER: We can't sustain the health care system on this continent either in Canada or the United States. This is the American graph, I'm going to show you ours in a minute. There's no government can generate this kind of revenue to feed a system like this and we haven't even hit the diabetes or the aging epidemic yet. So we have to change quickly. B.C. Revenue – this is a graph that came out created by our own Treasury Board analysts last year. This is the B.C. Health budget growing at about 8% a year projected out to 2017. This is the Education budget basically flatlined – no increase in dollars. This is all other government revenue. By 2017, it's under zero. That means the only thing government can fund by 2017 based on current projections is health care and education.

So, that woke a few people up when they saw that in government and it allowed us to get some change happening and we'll get there in a sec.

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One of the recurring issues that was mentioned in Brent's presentation, was the influence that foreign products are having on local B.C. farmers. And Brent explained how the apple industry here in B.C. is in real trouble

BRENT WARNER: The AG industry as we know it is changing quickly. The apple industry's in trouble – has been for awhile but it's really in trouble in the last few years. Apples cost about \$.53 a kilo to produce; the producers lose about \$.22 a kilo on every one they produce if they're shipping through a commodity system and they're not getting the absolute top dollar. So our apple industry is in total chaos and will change dramatically. What's driving that are these apples right here and this country right here. Look at the difference in production in China between 1992 and 2002. These are Fuji apples on the Vancouver market place at the same price as our apples only they're individually wrapped in Styrofoam – they're absolutely drop-dead gorgeous apples. There's no question about that. But we can't afford to compete in that market. And China is just starting to export apples.

Kiwi fruit – I was involved intimately with this industry. I brought Kiwi fruit to British Columbia – we have an industry on Vancouver Island. And we got slammed when Italy paid 40,000 acres of grapes grown by Italians – we pulled out and replaced with Kiwi with subsidies which depressed the world market from \$16 a tray to \$5 in 1986 and it's never recovered. So our industry sits at about 25 acres in the ground and can't get any bigger because we can't afford to produce them at that kind of price. The only guys that survive are the ones that sell in the local market.

JON STEINMAN: Another issue that has huge impacts on the choices we make at grocery stores is of course the issue of food safety. As Brent explained to the producers in the room, there have been many recent food safety issues that puts the small-scale producer into a more ideal position.

BRENT WARNER: Food safety is a huge issue. People are very aware of food issues because they see them in the paper. Most of them aren't real issues but that's what they see. They don't understand agriculture. They see corporations putting out juice that's made people sick. One child gets sick and the entire industry in North America has to change. So it doesn't matter what you do here in the Kootenays, something like that can affect how you produce apple juice. I

mean it's very, very serious. We now have most apple juice operations in North America being pasteurized.

We had E.coli outbreaks this year. Dole put out bagged salad mixes with E.coli in them – 275,000 were recalled so that affects how our health inspectors look at our salad mixes now which didn't use to be much of a high priority item on their list they now are. And of course you know about avian influenza, which was a disaster for all of us.

But the good part of this is the consumers are actually concerned enough that some of them are starting to ask questions. They'll come to you at a farmers market, they'll come to a store that's got local produce and say well is that produced by a local farmer. And then they can at least put a face on that food and it's not this scary product that it is when you see it in the paper like this.

JON STEINMAN: The topic of food safety is certainly one to cover in future broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner. Simply take a look at recent Mad Cow incidents and the affect that this has had on Canada's beef industry. Also look at Avian Flu and the affect on the poultry industry here in B.C. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has been criticized as having not taken the necessary measures to prevent these instances from happening. But looking at it simply, if we place incredible numbers of animals in incredibly confined spaces, disease and sickness is going to be a concern. Brent explained how along with increasing opportunities for small-scale fruit and vegetable growers, here presents another opportunity for small-scale livestock producers.

BRENT WARNER: So I'm saying that it's time we changed. We've repeated this process over and over and over with big AG getting bigger and bigger and the systems broken. Insanity means you have to do something different. If you keep doing it over and over there's something wrong with what you're thinking. So we have to change quickly here. And we've lost a lot. There're a lot of farmers gone already and a lot of farmland not in production. But things have happened and whether you've noticed or not we have a real push by various levels of governments to start thinking about fruits and vegetables which is the first step in the rejigging of the food system. And it's right across the world. We're seeing people with the five a day; men are suppose to eat nine a day and up to 10 a day of fruits and vegetables.

And these can be produced regionally - this is where the regional awareness comes and where you folks have an opportunity. Local fruits and vegetables – everybody knows, or should know that locally-produced products have a lot more nutritional value. They haven't been in a truck for three and a half weeks. For you as a farmer, you can actually make a living on local fruit production because you're not paying the middle man. You can do some of this prepacked stuff that people want. Most farm stands now do wash salad mixes as a simple thing or cut squash or whatever. Branding is key. You have to have an identity. Even as an

individual, Mad Dog Farm has got an interesting identity out there. Everybody should have some kind of identity. This is what they're saying about meat. Meat is the most obscure product in our average supermarket. It's always a generic slab of meat on a Styrofoam piece with a saran wrap on top – it's never branded. And yet that's changing dramatically. There's a study done for the beef industry here just last year that if we don't soon get our brand out there, consumers have lost confidence in what they're buying and it has to have a name and it has to stand for something. And so the beef industry is starting to come up, step up. Coleman natural beef - I met them in the early 80s. They were the first beef group in North America that actually started branding their beef and he was calling it 'natural' because there's no such thing as organic certification at that point. But he was delivering and created a market for Colorado beef in Chicago because he could - they could pick up a piece of his hamburger in a Chicago supermarket and they could run the bar code and within 30 seconds have the whole life history of that cow, in the store, if there was ever a problem. You can't do that anywhere in Canada right now with the people we have and that's was in the 80s and that's how he built his business.

JON STEINMAN: To provide some concrete examples of how small-scale producers in B.C. have been struggling and disappearing due to not only the rise in global industrial food production but the support that we as consumers give to these companies, Brent used Vancouver Island as an illustration of this.

BRENT WARNER: This is what's happening on Vancouver Island – has happened since the early 80s when I got there. In 1980 we had 30 dairy farms in Saanich Peninsula so it's side-by-side here. Now we have three, actually we probably have two next year. We had a commercial veg co-op where all the vegetable growers on Saanich Peninsula shipped to a main building packed where it was put into the stores in Victoria. It's gone, went bankrupt. We had 200 acres of Logan berries, we have one now. That was because we had Loganberry Winery in the 80s but there's not a lot of Loganberry wine made now although fruit wines have now gone to the bottom and are now coming back up. But it's a different type of production. We use to have 200 acres of potatoes in central Saanich, now we have none. And that's all the negative but the positive was in 1982, we sat together in a room like this with a bunch of people who were at the end of the rope and said, how are we going to change this and we created a direct marketing association. And now we have that association with 90 members, gross sales over \$20 million. They have a half-time manager and they're doing very well.

JON STEINMAN: Brent explained the progress of this direct marketing association and the support that it's receiving around Vancouver Island.

BRENT WARNER: Every single farm basically on Vancouver Island now. That association has expanded almost all the way up almost Courtenay. So the book that is very similar to what you started here travels up and down the island – they

do 163,000 copies that goes through various – some that goes out through the newspaper so goes right into everybody's home and then they have it as a tourism off-piece as well. You know how these things work. The beauty of what these guys have done I think that a lot of people never did is that they developed the partnerships to help pay for it. They got industry on side, they got restaurants on side, everybody's paying a bit to keep this food system going.

JON STEINMAN: You can check out the association's website at www.islandfarmfresh.com. We are going to take a quick musical break and when we return, we will wrap up the presentation by B.C. Ministry of Agriculture's Brent Warner.

musical break

And welcome back to here Deconstructing Dinner. If you are just tuning in to Deconstructing Dinner, on today's show we're listening to clips of a presentation by Brent Warner. Brent is with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and he conducted this presentation in Nelson at a recent meeting of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. As was mentioned earlier, supporting farmers' markets is an ideal way to support local producers and keep your dollars in your local economy. And as Brent explained in his presentation, the increasing number of farmers' markets in B.C. is a promising sign. There is only one problem.

BRENT WARNER: Farmers' markets are booming in this province. Bertie Wells who is the Executive Director of the Farmers' Market Association, I just talked to her last night and we just got the 100th registered farm market in this province. So there's 100 farmers' markets in B.C. now. They are make it, bake it, grow it markets. And that's from zero six years ago. So there's a huge expansion and the one limiting factors to farmers' markets in this province right now is the lack of farmers. Almost every market can't find enough farmers.

JON STEINMAN: I can remind you that all of these clips of B.C. Ministry of Agriculture's Brent Warner, are from a presentation that was directed towards farmers and producers, and as these issues affect the people growing and producing our food, Brent explained the role that we as consumers have in helping support these small-scale producers.

BRENT WARNER: For the farmer if you're tied into a regional food system, you're out of the commodity system which you're never going to survive in on a small-scale, you're getting paid immediately, you can concentrate on your crop production and land stewardship if you know the community is behind you. Doesn't matter if you do a direct sales to the co-op here, if you've got a CSA, you've got a farm stand, at least you know the community's coming out to buy your products. And you get loyal customers that demand your product. The consumers are finally really realizing that this is something different; this is real food; it's highly nutritious; it tastes like something and they're willing to pay for it.

They get to talk to you. That's why farmers' markets, this is the Courtenay market is so exciting because you can actually talk to a farmer. And farmers, like you guys are just like a Dodo birds to the average urbanite. They have never really seen one of you guys before. They get a little leery around you. It's an experience and that's what they come for. They come to see what a real farmer does. We're three generations away from being farmers as a society and that's giving us an opportunity.

JON STEINMAN: As has commonly been mentioned up until now, our food choices exist in grocery stores and markets. But let's not forget the food that we buy in restaurants. Here in this province for one, British Columbians spend more on food at restaurants than Canadians do in any other province. Restaurants can of course be instrumental in supporting local farmers. I remember once having the opportunity to meet a local farmer in Kelowna who had mentioned that one of the local winery restaurants acted almost like a vacuum when his vegetables were ready for harvest. His farm is located directly in the middle of Kelowna itself, and has yet to be bulldozed for a housing development. Brent who was recently working with farmers in Hawaii, used an example of a restaurant where they only support local growers.

BRENT WARNER: Restaurant opportunities are out there. In major urban areas some of the restaurants are getting it. This is a guy in Hawaii who has three restaurants – Peter Merriman. He built this whole chain on the fact that he is 100% Hawaiian. He bought Hawaiian food there. He supports all his wine growers. Local vegetables he'll tell you whose they are. He has pictures of all his farmers up in the stores. They're in his restaurants. Sorry the collection of photographs there is his tomato grower. His lamb operation...

JON STEINMAN: Brent spoke of the benefits to communities and cities when local and regional foods are supported, but he also cites an example of how farming has lost its status in the minds of many Canadians.

BRENT WARNER: So the advantages for this society in your own community is to be a part of the community. You have a stronger local economy if you have a strong AG economy. AG economies drive rural economies and that's already documented. I was at a meeting just (where was it) just locally where this woman was talking about careers for kids and they had a whole bunch of children there and they had – and it was an agricultural event too and they had a sign like this under this little young lady would be "Doctor" and under this other one would be "Lawyer" and another one would be "Rocket Scientist." And I said, where's the "Farmer?" There wasn't one. We don't have farmers as role models anymore.

JON STEINMAN: Brent concluded his presentation by mentioning the key factor that will bring locally-supported agriculture back home. And he mentions one provincially-funded initiative that is aimed at encouraging students to be more aware of local foods.

BRENT WARNER: Working with the health agencies I think is key and you're going to see why in just a second. Always promoting eating closer to the farm – food miles are the one thing that's going to bring agriculture back home and I think that's a thing you're going to want to talk about. This is a program I'm involved in – I'll be mentioning briefly. Last fall, September we started putting fresh fruit and vegetables back into B.C. schools. We tested on ten schools in the province. We have two in the Kootenays, one in the Slocan city and one in Erickson. Twice a week these children eat fresh fruit, B.C. fruit and vegetables. And it could be an apple, it could be a sliced apples, it could be a cucumber, whatever we happen to be delivering. The goal is to do that to all 1600 elementary schools in the province by 2009 so that all of our children will be eating two B.C. fresh fruit and vegetable snacks. So we had this little discussion yesterday – Jeremy at his place – no it's not going to be Kootenay-sourced, it's not going to be Okanagan-sourced. It's going to be wherever I can get a million pieces of something. The beauty of it is, it's run through the B.C. AG and Classroom Foundation. All the materials are being generated to go home with the kids and talk about buying local – looking for food in your local community, looking at your local farmers' market. To run something provincially we've got to be able to source provincially because Fort St. John doesn't have a lot of access to much of anything and neither does Bella Coola.

So, there's huge opportunities here. Get involved with your school system. They're going to be experiencing fresh fruit and vegetables. We're also putting refrigeration into all elementary schools again so they can handle dairy products and fruit and vegetables. So there's opportunities for local producers to get back to the school system.

JON STEINMAN: And on that note, Brent's presentation was concluded. But the topic of how food issues are making their way into our schools is an upcoming topic to be covered here on Deconstructing Dinner. And you can stay posted to the program's website and stay informed as to when that show will air.

For those of you who may have missed the beginning of this broadcast, all of those audio clips were from a presentation given by B.C. Ministry of Agriculture's Brent Warner at a recent meeting of the Kootenay Organic Growers Society. Brent is an Industry Specialist whose work revolves around Agritourism and Direct Marketing. Brent is also the secretary of the North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association – and their website is www.nafdma.com. And if any of this show perhaps inspired you to learn more about how to sell locally produced foods to your local communities, you can check out Brent's book "Marketing on the Edge" by visiting www.farmcentre.com.

And in wrapping things up, as I mentioned at the beginning of the program, that although this show revolved around a presentation directed to producers and farmers, the issues discussed at this meeting were as relevant to you and I as

they were to those in attendance. And should you be interested in getting in touch with your local Organic Farming Associations or are interested in seeing a list of what farmers in and around your communities are growing and producing food, you can visit the Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia website at www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca. For those listeners tuning in to the broadcast on Southern Vancouver Island, you can also check out www.islandfarmfresh.com. There will also be some more links to similar websites from the Deconstructing Dinner website.

ending theme

JON STEINMAN: And that was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded in the studios of Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant tonight Dianne Matenko.

All of those affiliated with this station are volunteers, and financial support for this station is received through membership, donations and sponsorship from local businesses and organizations. For more information on the station or to become a member, you can visit www.cjly.net, or dial 250-352-9600. And should you have any comments about tonight's show, want to learn more about topics covered, or want to listen to this broadcast all over again, you can visit the website for Deconstructing Dinner at www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner. Till next week...